

## Back to Life by orphan\_account

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**Summary:**

The first day back to Hawkins Middle School leaves Will Byers thinking it would have been better to stay in the hospital for a while longer.

## Back to Life

Since the 6<sup>th</sup> of November, life had been far from normal for Will Byers. The week following that date had been spent in a rotting, hellish place and the month after spent throwing up slugs. But now perhaps the strangest occurrence of all, he was going back to the school that he'd been announced as dead to the entire student body.

Jonathan and Joyce had reassured him that with his fake story of being kidnapped, none of the other kids would question him, they'd only be supportive. But neither of them had quite understood the extent of the bullying that Will faced, most of which Troy could be held accountable for.

Joyce had been very caring to Will since his return from the Upside Down, making sure he was always comfortable and if he needed anything, providing. This behaviour had caused a small amount of change on Will's body, less than 15 lbs, but still something.

This factor was not going to help his chances of a bully free first day, not only now was he a 'queer', but now he was a 'chubby queer', well, those were the first words out of Troy's mouth, following was the expected 'better off dead', but that wasn't what got to Will, it was 'chubby' that really bothered him.

Will, was definitely *not* chubby, being 4'9" and now 87lbs, if anything, he was a normal weight, but bullies always like to exaggerate anything that might make a person uncomfortable, or different from his fellow students.

But Will was a sensitive kid, he used to be so angry at himself for his sexuality, but after Lonnie and Troy's homophobic slurs had become part of his daily routine, he was used to it. But 'chubby'? That was something that Will Byers would never want to associate himself with. Of course he had no problem with it on others, Dustin being the foodie he was could definitely be described as chubby by some, and he was one of Will's best friends. But himself being described as that, made him sick to his stomach.

Little bouts of teasing continued over the day, but mainly whispers

and stares that 'Will Byers isn't dead, and he's still just as much a queer as ever, but now he's chubby too'. It was all a bit too much.

As soon as he reached his house on the outskirts of Hawkins, he broke. Standing in front of the full length mirror in the corner of his bedroom, he took off his shirt and prodded his ever so slightly protruding stomach. It had gone from something that he didn't even think about, to his biggest concern. He was Will Byers, a short, skinny, smart wizard. How was he going to be able to out-wit his enemies if they had a new strength, something that not even Will the Wise could prepare for, not being skinny.

The thought of avoiding food didn't occur until one day whilst preparing to leave Mike's house after a lengthy session of D&D, he had gone with Dustin to offer Nancy the final slice of their regular order of sausage and peperoni pizza. She had declined politely, she was trying to lose weight in preparation for a date with Steve, and pizza would definitely not help. Dustin had laughed about why she would need to lose weight when she was already 'as thin as a twig', and then offered the last slice to Will for a final time, Will promptly gave a response of no, kicking himself for eating any of the pizza that day.

It was small things at first, declining extra food from his mother, avoiding foods high in sugar in the school lunch hall, all things that a normal healthy human would do, nothing unusual, so it went unnoticed.

By the next time that the boys were at Mike's for another game of Dungeons and Dragons, Will decided that he would decline the pizza with the excuse that he was having a special meal with his family that night and didn't want to spoil his appetite. It was of course a complete lie, but no one needed to know that.

Then it was taking lunch to school instead of buying it when he got there. He persuaded Joyce to let him make it, so he started with making very healthy things, like two pieces of wholemeal bread and a piece of lettuce, but he despised the blandness of it, so he started just making his lunch and once he got to school he would throw it out when no one was looking.

The lack of food at lunch got the other boys questioning, so Will told them that he simply wasn't hungry at the time lunch was scheduled in their school, so he would eat his lunch at home afterwards, again it was all lies, but again, no one needed to know it.

The lack of food had helped Will down to his weight at the time of the 6<sup>th</sup> of November, 73 lbs, but his behaviour had hardwired into him, so he continued, unaware of how his habit was affecting his judgement. Before any of this had started, before the bullying, before he restarted school, Will was aware of his increase in weight, but had thought it a good thing to happen, he had always been slightly too skinny, slightly underweight. He had always had to wear belts on the tightest setting, wear clothes that were intended for kids two or three years younger than Will himself, so going up 15 pounds was really just a well needed improvement, he thought it had suited him.

Thinking with this mind set was now well beyond Will's capabilities, he avoided any conversation about body image, or food or even himself in fear that his secret would be cracked and he would be forced to stop, forced to become his nightmare.

Will had had a few close calls, but it wasn't until March when he was finally caught in the act of throwing out his lunch. Mr Clarke had been worried about Will for a few weeks, observing him go behind the school building, he suspected that he could have been influenced by some of the older students to smoke, but that was very unlike Will, so one day he followed him.

What he saw, horrified him, Will lifted up a lid to one of the school dumpsters and threw in three days' worth of sandwiches. He didn't want to jump to conclusions so he headed back to his classroom to think about what he had seen. Being one of the science teachers at Hawkins Middle School, Scott was required to teach Health and Social to the older years, this meant that he was relatively familiar with the warning signs of an eating disorder, but this was Will Byers, he was a smart, friendly and strong kid. Sure he had a fair amount of bullying to Scott's knowledge, but he was definitely not the type to fall victim to an eating disorder.

Maybe he was over exaggerating what he had seen, perhaps Will just took that route as a quick way to get to the lunch hall and being a

helpful student, found some trash on the floor so threw it away. That made so much more sense than an eating disorder, so he decided that was the case, but also decided to keep an eye on Will's behaviour at lunch in the future.

Will wasn't stupid, he had seen Mr Clarke, and he just hoped that he hadn't seen what Will was doing. He couldn't have Mr Clarke, his favourite teacher and one of his biggest influential figures, knowing that he was weak. He had to be so careful, he could not let another mistake like this happen again.

Jonathan was the next to notice that something was up with Will's eating patterns. It was spring break, they were both home during the day whilst Joyce was working. Jonathan made breakfast one morning when Will came into the kitchen grabbed a glass of water and left, he thought it was odd, but it was probably just his brother wanting a lie in, after all, they were on holiday.

When this behaviour continued, he started to worry. Jonathan couldn't recall Will eating breakfast for a long time now, he had just thought that Will was waking up earlier for school and making his own breakfast, but he had always thought it strange how he would still leave at normal time.

It was especially strange as Will had expressed only months before how breakfast was his favourite meal of the day, it would take a lot for him to miss it, but now he was skipping it as if he had done it his whole life. He had also noted how pained Will looked at meal times, avoiding conversation and not finishing his food even if it were to be a small portion.

Jonathan decided not to ask Joyce if she knew what was wrong, he didn't want to worry her with things that she didn't already know about, so one afternoon when both of the boys were playing on Will's Atari with one of Jonathan's favourite albums playing in the background, he decided to ask about Will's habits.

"Will, I just want you to know that you're perfect just the way you are." Jonathan paused the game and faced his brother, taking his hands and placing them in his own.

“What are you talking about?” Will flinched at the touch but appreciated the gesture.

“I’ve noticed that you’ve been acting really strange around meal times, and have been skipping breakfast entirely, I’ve been really worried about you, Will.” At this, Will burst into tears, a pressure that had been building up for months finally released.

Will didn’t talk much about what was going on, but Jonathan had already guessed as much, he just hugged Will tightly as he cried. Jonathan and Will had always had a close bond, but this only brought them closer. Jonathan said that he wouldn’t tell Joyce if Will started to try and eat some more food at meal times, or at least try to.

So from then on, whenever they would sit at the dinner table together, Jonathan would give Will’s hand a reassuring squeeze if he noticed him struggling. It seemed for a while that things were getting better, Will was back at his normal weight and was smiling a hell of a lot more, but after an exciting summer where all of the bad thoughts had left and Will was eating normally again, Jonathan left to go to College, and Will fell harder than ever.

Troy was always going to be the blame, Will felt angry at himself for not seeing it coming. He had been at lunch with Mike, Lucas and Dustin when Mike offered him a piece of laffy taffy, a perfect time for Troy to come and ruin things.

“I see your boyfriend is feeding you well, fairy, just remember, you can’t fly when you’re fat.” Will couldn’t breathe, the whole cafeteria was silent, and he could hear his heart pounding against his chest. He had let his guard down, he had reversed all his hard work, and humiliated Mike along with it.

“Hey, piss off Troy, just because he has friends who are kind and sharing, you couldn’t even dream of people liking you because you’re nice” Mike stood up, trying his best to be intimidating, Will was so blessed to have people like Mike in his life.

“Alright frog face, we all know you love your boyfriend, calm down” With this Mike took Will’s hand and pulled him up so he was standing.

“You know what, Will, I like you a lot, you’re sweet, smart and brave and that is so much more important than being popular, or infamous for being a jerk, for this reason, with your permission, I should like to kiss you right now.” Will nodded, completely shocked by what was happening and with that Mike planted a kiss on his lips.

Mike Wheeler was the first person to ever kiss Will, and he could not have been happier to say that, the room went from silent to applause, Dustin and Lucas were laughing at the completely shocked expression on Troy’s face. Mike pulled Will into a hug,

“You’re perfect Will, screw what Troy has to say, I love you.” Mike whispered into Will’s ear, warmth spread over Will’s cheeks and he returned with an ‘I love you too’

The day had gone from bad to good very quickly, but Will still couldn’t stop Troy’s words from earlier ringing through his head ‘you can’t fly when you’re fat’, chubby was one thing, but fat, that was something else entirely. Is that really what people thought of him now? Sure they had cheered him on, but when the room first went silent he could feel their eyes burning into him, judging him.

He couldn’t believe that had had let all of his hard work go, but with Jonathan at college, he promised himself that he could get back to that 67lbs that he had reached before.

It started straight away, this was an urgent matter, and nothing was going to get in his way this time.

Mr Clarke. Of everyone Will was close to, it had to be Mr Clarke. He had asked Will to stay after in a science lesson one day, it wasn’t too odd, but it was strange that he didn’t ask all four boys like normal, however once he recognised the serious tone that he was speaking with, he knew exactly what it was about.

Will hadn’t forgotten the time when Mr Clarke followed him to the dumpster behind the school, clearly neither had Mr Clarke. He had seen what Will was doing and it concerned him, but he had noticed that he stopped doing it, for a while at least, but now Will was doing it more than ever and he noticed him throwing away his lunch each time. This wasn’t just Will throwing away trash, this was an eating

disorder if he had ever seen one.

“Will, I am concerned about your health.” Mr Clarke began. “A while ago I noticed that you had been going behind the school building at the beginning of lunch break, so once I followed you around there, worried that you might have been influenced by some of the older students to smoke. I watched you throw away some three days’ worth of sandwiches, this concerned me, but I wrote it off as you throwing away some litter on the ground. Now I have observed you repeat this for over a week and I am worried that you’re suffering from some form of eating disorder.”

Will couldn’t believe this was happening, he didn’t know what to say. Hunger pangs were making him feel very ill, and the tension of the situation was making him feel even more uncomfortable.

“I don’t expect you to say anything, Will, but as I am very worried about you, I just wanted you to know that you can talk to me. I’m not going to tell anyone about this, however if you do want me to speak with your mother, or Jonathan, I would be more than happy to. My sister suffered with an eating disorder when I was younger and it was so painful to be around, I want you to know that I am here.”

Mr Clarke’s intentions were good, but only made Will’s anxiety worse. He thought now that everyone was watching him, judging him by his every move. Mike had caught on that something was wrong with Will when he stopped accepting candy, but now he would just stare into his lap all lunchtime, it was scary to see Will so down.

Mike decided to plan a new game of Dungeons and Dragons as the boys hadn’t played in a while, he planned to have Will the Wise come into a bout of trouble and Dustin and Lucas to help him through, he hoped that it would show him that he really is loved.

Will was excited to hear about the new planned session, he loved being Will the Wise, it made him feel so important and wanted and allowed him to escape from his fears for a while.

He arrived at Mike’s house, anticipating an amazing campaign, Mike had been planning it for weeks now and from what little information he had let slip, it sounded brilliant. Mike didn’t disappoint. Will’s



character had been captured by a mysterious beast described as a black fog, but all that it's body was made of is bones, he had been stuck down a hole, avoiding death for most of the campaign until Dustin and Lucas's characters came to save him. They risked their lives for him, both of them had come very close to dead on multiple occasions, but they still persevered and rescued Will.

He could tell that Mike had planned this campaign around what had been going on recently, the creature, being made of bones could have been a metaphor for Will's missing of meals, slowly becoming bones and the black fog around it could have symbolises the sadness that he had been channelling. Will had been so happy when he was rescued, he felt so loved.

Mike's plan had worked, Will was beaming and hugging everyone by the time the campaign finished, it was very late, so Mike invited Will to stay over to avoid him having to cycle over Mirkwood by himself.

He set up two sleeping bags next to each other in the basement, he wanted to be with Will.

They lay awake with the lights dim, for a while before long Mike heard snuffles coming from Will. He wrapped an arm around the boy, shocked at how small he was, Mike whispered words of reassurance into Will's hair.

"Thank you Mike, thank you for everything." Will melted into Mike's arms.

"It's okay Will, for you I would do anything, especially to keep you happy."

"I only need one thing to be happy."

"What's that?"

"You."